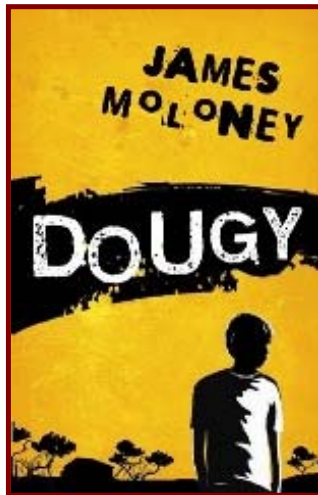


UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

# DOUGY

## James Moloney



### Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising middle school teacher-librarian

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**SYNOPSIS**

*Dougy* is the first in James Moloney's contemporary trilogy that deals with a range of issues facing Aboriginal society. Building in complexity as the trilogy evolves, *Dougy* reveals to readers the surface layers of fear and misunderstanding between black and white Australia that has existed for decades. The history and depth of such unrest is explored further in *Gracey* and *Angela*.

Dougy is a thirteen year old Aborigine living in a remote outback town comprised of both black and white communities. The blacks live mainly in government subsidised housing which causes some angst amongst the whites. Although there is an uneasy concord in place, there is obvious division between the two cultures.

This tension is heightened when Dougy's talented sister Gracey is offered a sporting scholarship at an exclusive private school in Brisbane. Local whites see this as biased and yet another example of 'handouts' to the blacks. They ignore the fact that Gracey has immense talent as a sprinter.

Racial fear and misunderstanding is intensified when a young white girl is found unconscious in the bush. Some 'redneck' young whites ambush the blacks, blaming the Aborigine Johnny Warren for her state. When a shot is accidentally fired from a rifle, the township descends into a senseless siege – black against white. This siege is fuelled by a mutual fear and mistrust between both sides.

Much of this story revolves around the retelling of the Aboriginal legend of the *Moodagudda*, an evil spirit that lives in the nearby river. When the township is threatened by the flooding river, Dougy is certain that the *Moodagudda* is to blame.

**THEMES****Relationships:**

- Dougy relies on his sister Gracey. Although he is thirteen, he is still in primary school and hasn't learnt to read or write properly. He has very low self esteem.
- Dougy, Gracey and their older brother Raymond live with their mother. Their father – a drunk – lives a nomadic lifestyle and sees his family possibly once or twice a year.
- The Aboriginal community care for each other. They are a unit, a family.
- Much of the relationship between black and white in the town is feeble. It breaks down easily. There is one white character, Brett, son of the local police sergeant, who is genuine about his desire to uncover the truth. There are a few other whites who treat the blacks fairly too.

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- There is little acceptance or tolerance by the whites of the blacks. They are quick to judge and criticise.

**Identity:**

- The story begins with the telling of the *Moodagudda*. Dougy and Gracey don't know much of their ancestral heritage. They are modern Aborigines who seem rather apathetic about the legends and culture of their people. This slowly changes throughout the duration of the trilogy.

**Racial Issues:**

- Alcoholism – a 'white man's' disease that has infiltrated black communities
- Resentment from whites of assistance given to Aborigines such as government allowances, scholarships etc
- Tentative acceptance of blacks by the whites in the township, provided they live like whites. The whites possess a sense of superiority.
- Pack mentality, fear and misunderstanding fuel much of the tension. This escalates until tragedy strikes and people lose their lives.
- Inequality of resources and standards.
- Stereotyped attitudes about Aboriginal Australians are highlighted. These are confronted in *Gracey* and in particular, *Angela*.

**WRITING STYLE**

*Dougy* is told in first person, past tense. Dougy's voice is authentic and believable. It has a vulnerability and a naivety that perfectly reflects his character. He is on the brink of maturity but lacks confidence and support other than that offered by Gracey. When she leaves for Brisbane, Dougy feels abandoned and alone.

**AUTHOR MOTIVATION**

This was only the second novel published by James Moloney and he was still experimenting with ways of expressing his own ideas about Australian society and humanity in general. The first person was used deliberately as a way to 'get inside the head' of the main character.

Writing in 1990, he was also keen to challenge the way that Aborigines were represented in literature for the young up to that time. He felt earlier authors had been afraid to present them as 'real' and tended to make all Aboriginal characters into saints or victims, or at best loveable scallywags when in reality they are capable of great strength and prone to all manner of human failings like anyone else. They do face significant difficulties that white children do not and the author was determined to explore these with honesty and insight.

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**STUDY NOTES**

- *Dougy* highlights black and white tension on a local level, even though it is deeply seeded in the history of 'White Australia'. Compare this with racial issues from a more global perspective, examining both historical and more recent examples of racial tension. For example:
  - Apartheid in South Africa
  - Civil Rights movement in the USA
  - Unrest in Zimbabwe
  - Kurds in Iraq
  - Jews in Nazi Germany
  - Slavery
- Discuss the sentiment that 'violence often feeds on fear'. Use examples to support your viewpoint.
- What role does 'pack mentality' play in violence and misunderstanding? Explain.
- Dougy's father is only really mentioned at the beginning of the story. Is this significant to the narrative? Why?
- Use a graphic organiser or table to compare the personality of Dougy with that of his brother Raymond.
- Describe the relationship between Dougy and Gracey.
- If you were Gracey, would you have left for Brisbane? Explain your answer.
- Dougy and his family visit Brisbane. Imagine you are one of the family. Write a letter home to your Auntie Flo describing what it is like to visit the city.
- Do you think that Dougy's mother should have spent her money on a going away party for Gracey? Explain.
- Why do you think that Cooper jumped to the conclusion that Johnny Warren was responsible for Melissa's state?
- What do you think of the way in which the whites handled the situation with Melissa Brodie? How did the sequence of events make you as the reader feel? What do you think James Moloney was trying to illustrate through the actions of Cooper and his followers?
- Why did Raymond refuse to leave Ron Kendall's body, even as the rising flood waters entered the hall?
- Read a range of Aboriginal legends. If not the *Moodagudda* lurking in the river, how else could an evil spirit have been incorporated into the text?
- The second chapter begins with "My name's Dougy. I'm nobody much." (p7) Explain the importance of Dougy's initial self concept as the story unfolds. Why does he feel this way? Has this changed at the novel's conclusion?
- List some examples of the inequality faced by the blacks in their town. Have they a right to feel angry or bitter towards the whites? Explain.

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- Reread p58-59. Why is Gracey's mother so determined for her to accept the scholarship to Hamilton College?
- As the siege escalates, the rising floodwaters hit their peak. Discuss the metaphor taking place between these two scenarios.
- Compare the events and theme of racial tension in *Dougy* with relevant scenes from movies such as *West Side Story* or Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo and Juliet*.
  - Create a soundtrack for a film version of *Dougy*, considering which tracks would suit various components of the text
  - Alternatively, select or compose a song that would suit a particular scene of *Dougy*, giving a rationale for your choice

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Born in Sydney, James Moloney grew up and was educated in Brisbane. He completed teacher training at Griffith University and also holds diplomas in Teacher Librarianship and Computer Education. He has taught in a number of Queensland State Schools as both a classroom teacher and a librarian. His experiences as a young teacher in western Queensland have had a profound effect on his writing, especially in his early novels.

James now writes full-time and has written over twenty books for children and Young Adults. His first novel, *Crossfire*, was listed as a Notable Book in the CBCA awards in 1993. His short novel *Swashbuckler* won the Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Award in 1996 and in the following year, *A Bridge to Wiseman's Cove* was named Book of the Year in the CBCA's Older Readers category. His other titles have appeared regularly on shortlists for literary prizes and children's choice awards ever since.

James says: *'I like to get inside the head of today's adolescents, to connect with the passion they have for life and understand what they care about. The challenge then is to express it in a story. That challenge keeps me young. I love it.'*